



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

ALBANIA

FACT SHEET

Democracy and Governance

INCREASED INVOLVEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DECISION- MAKING



Pjerin Marku of the Albanian Coalition Against Corruption, an NGO that has trained some 3,000 domestic election observers. USAID funded Marku's group, media monitoring efforts, training sessions for officials at the Central Election Commission, and a voter awareness campaign, among other pre-election activities.

PROJECTS

- Democracy and Governance in Albania (Jan. 2004- Sept. 2007)
- Local Government and Decentralization in Albania (July 2004-July 2007)
- Albania Technical Election Assistance Project (Feb. 2002-May 2006)

CURRENT SITUATION

In the last decade and a half since the transition to elected government, Albania has weathered its share of troubles. Financial crisis and political instability brought on by the collapse of the pyramid schemes of the late 1990s nearly brought the democratization process to a halt. Political stability has been restored. However, Albanian democracy remains beset by weak institutions and the related issues of corruption and patronage. Having completed its fourth parliamentary elections in 2005, Albania has seen many electoral improvements. However, its elections are said to “only partially comply” with international standards. Local governments have begun to function as a result of decentralization, but authority remains highly centralized and local service provision is very weak. Civil society has seen remarkable growth, spawning a free media and a crop of more assertive NGOs. Nevertheless, cynicism about institutions -- from parties to parliament to the courts -- spans the political spectrum.

In summary, while it is difficult to discern at times, Albania's progress in democratization is unmistakable. As a new government takes the reins, Albania has a chance to make reform and improve its prospects for Euro-Atlantic integration, thereby regaining lost public confidence along the way. USAID/Albania will assist in these efforts. Our program aims at boosting civic groups that advocate and monitor reforms, at improving the electoral process and local governance.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

USAID/Albania's democracy and governance program aims at improving governance and government accountability by providing technical assistance through three activities to nongovernmental organizations and to local and central government institutions. Numerous civic organizations, including the Albanian Coalition Against Corruption (ACAC) and the Citizens Advocacy Office (CAO) are engaged in watchdog functions, from monitoring media and elections to auditing party finances to tracking the interests and assets of government officials. The program helps strengthen political parties by promoting organizational democracy, and provides support to citizen groups that engage with local governments on budget and other issues. The USAID/Albania program also supports the Albanian decentralization process by providing policy support and direct, often on-site technical assistance to city governments throughout Albania. USAID/Albania's election support activity assisted the Central Election Commission and supporting entities in their efforts to bring Albanian elections closer to international standards.

PROGRAM FOCUS

- Enhancing public sector accountability and transparency;
- Strengthening civic advocacy and watchdog NGOs;
- Improving investigative media;
- Strengthening political parties;
- Improving the integrity of the electoral process;
- Increasing independence and capability of local governments.

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Bardhylka Kospiri, the advocacy group coordinator for the Albanian Disability Rights Foundation, expressed her appreciation for the USAID grant to support the foundation's efforts to improve the lives of people living with disabilities in Albania.

SUCCESSES

- USAID-funded Albanian Coalition Against Corruption coordinated the largest-ever domestic elections monitoring effort for the July 2005 elections comprising more than 3,200 trained and credentialed volunteer monitors stationed at polling places throughout the country.
- USAID funded the first-ever pre-election public opinion poll in May 2005. The poll utilized a large (1,300 respondent) national sample and wound up being the single best predictor of the election result. Poll data was also used to help parties shape their electoral platforms in advance of the elections.
- USAID sponsored a NGO media monitoring effort, which used a computerized system to track bias in broadcast and print media coverage of the news during the 2005 election campaign. These efforts produced an interactive reporting system that forced the media to compete with each other to provide greater balance in their coverage of election events and issues.
- USAID sponsored a historically unprecedented series of parliamentary debates throughout Albania that were televised on a national network created through USAID funding.
- In partnership with the Albanian Central Election Commission (CEC), USAID supported a massive public information campaign that informed people how and where to vote, utilizing everything from banners and kiosks to pamphlets, posters, even sugar packets. The result was a sharp reduction in invalidated votes due to improper balloting in the 2005 elections.
- Together with the US Embassy/Tirana, USAID sponsored the production of up-to-date satellite images of all of Albania's major cities. These images were then used to create digital Geographic Information System (GIS) maps, which were subsequently used by Albanian authorities to construct voter lists for the 2005 parliamentary elections.

Contact Information:
USAID/Albania
Tel: + 355 4 241 999
<http://albania.usaid.gov>